

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENWICH BOARD OF EDUCATION

DATE: Thursday, November 2, 2006

PLACE: Havemeyer Board Room

PRESENT:

Board: Mrs. Colleen Giambo, Chairman
Ms. Virginia L. Gwynn, Vice Chairman
Ms. Leslie B. Moriarty, Secretary
Mr. Steven B. Anderson
Mr. Michael C. Bodson
Dr. Susan E. Ellis
Mr. William G. Kelly
Mrs. Nancy Weissler

Administration:

Dr. Betty J. Sternberg, Superintendent of Schools
Mrs. Mary Capwell, Deputy Superintendent
Mr. John Curtin, Asst. Superintendent
Dr. Susan Wallerstein, Asst. Supt., Business Operations
Ms. Mary P. Forde, Director, Pupil Personnel Services
Ms. Kim Eves, Director, Communications
Dr. Ellen Flanagan, Director, Human Resources

Other: Mrs. Janice Richards, PTA Council; Ms. Barbara O'Neill, ALP Coordinator; Ms. Marie Jordan-Whitney, Coordinator, Reading and Language Arts; Ms. Libby Ross, Educational Evaluator for Special Education; Ms. Gerri Fleming, Cos Cob PTA/SES; Ms. Paige Davis, GHS/SES; Ms. Michele Regan, ISD/SES; Ms. Laurie Schelz, GHS/SES; Mr. Alex Popp, Riverside School Parent; Ms. M.J. Foti, GHS/PTAC; Ms. Linda Wilkens, Hamilton Avenue; Ms. Janice Linnan, ISD; Mr. Ken Borsuk, Greenwich Post; Ms. Hoa Nguyen Greenwich Time.

An attendance list is on file in the Superintendent's Office.

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Giambo, Chairman at 7:00 p.m.

- 1. Action on Secretary's Request to Approve the Minutes of October 12, 2006.**

MOTION: It was moved by Mrs. Moriarty and seconded by Ms. Gwynn to approve the Minutes of October 12, 2006.

VOTE: 8 in favor, none opposed MOTION CARRIED

2. Debriefing and Discussion on Implication of Linkage Meetings (Focus Groups on High Quality Preschool.)

Dr. Ellis reported on the Board's efforts to engage the community in a discussion around the District's role in ensuring a high quality preschool experience for all students; a factor included in the report of the District's Closing the Achievement Gap Design Team.

Part I: Community Conversation on October 4, 2006: The Value of High Quality Preschool in Closing Achievement Gaps. The forum was attended by public school and private preschool staff, parents and PTA representatives as well as community leaders. There were two featured speakers, Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan and Dr. Walter S. Gilliam, and two Greenwich Public School Kindergarten teachers, Ms. Gloria Sprigg and Ms. Kristin Goldstein, who shared their classroom experiences with the levels of readiness.

Part II: Three focus groups were held on October 17 and 18, 2006 discussing what should be the role of the Greenwich Public Schools in ensuring that all students enter Kindergarten ready to learn. Each focus group was attended by 20-25 people, including public and private preschool parents, public elementary, middle and high school parents, teachers and administrators from the public and private preschools and various community leaders.

Dr. Ellis noted that the main themes from each focus group were similar:

1. Initiate consistent, purposeful and planned collaboration between private preschools and the Greenwich Public Schools. Specific comments included clarify and develop consistent expectations and standards in curriculum and instruction, provide staff development opportunities, strengthen communication. Ms. Forde discussed the scheduling of joint meetings for all preschools in Town on common topics, like issues with fine motor skills.
2. Remove the obstacles and provide access for all children to attend high quality preschool. Specific comments included addressing financial limitations, transportation issues, hours of operation and services provided for working families as well as identifying "at-risk" students to ensure their enrollment.

3. Provide parent education on value of high quality preschool, how to identify a high quality program and what children should know and be able to do as they enter Kindergarten. Some of the comments included provide clear, consistent information about the definition of “high quality preschool,” communicate before the registration cycle, engage in family outreach.

A copy of the summary will be sent to all participants and a report will be submitted to Closing the Achievement Gap Design Team’s Preschool Committee for follow-up.

3. Discussion of Balanced Literacy, K-5

Dr. Sternberg introduced the discussion of the recent changes to the Letter and Word Study component of the elementary Balanced Literacy curriculum. She indicated that this discussion is part of the District’s monitoring report on academic achievement. She indicated that the Committee made a conscientious effort to review available research. One report that was referenced was produced by the State’s Department of Education entitled “Connecticut’s Blueprint for Reading Achievement, The Report of the Early Reading Success Panel.” The “Blueprint” was produced when there was a great concern about whole language versus phonics. In compiling the report, the Department brought in researchers from around the nation representing various points of view. The conclusion drawn was there is no opposition between phonics instruction and teaching higher level comprehensive skills. All of these strategies are part of a high quality primary reading program; balanced in appropriate ways for each child.

Ms. Marie Jordan-Whitney, Coordinator of Reading and Language Arts, and Ms. Libby Ross, Educational Evaluator for Special Education indicated that a Committee of regular and special educators was formed in April 2006 to develop a scope and sequence for decoding and spelling that is consistent with the GPS objectives and incorporates current research. The Committee found that each elementary school was using different delivery models with different levels of success and that the identification of students requiring intervention was occurring too late, after a student was already behind his peers. The Committee supported identifying a single delivery model to be used by all schools and a tiered approach to intervention. The Committee evaluated three programs that met the District’s criteria and chose Hampton-Brown’s “Phonics and Friends” as the District’s core instructional program. The program utilizes different approaches to learning how to read: including songs, books and rhyming exercises along with games integrated into the lessons. The program was purchased for all K-2 classrooms and implemented at the beginning of this school year. Staff development on the new program is ongoing. GPS preschools are using the Level “A” kit of Hampton-Brown which will provide consistency in terms of program from preschool through K-2. The Committee indicated that 30 minutes of the 60

minute daily reading block is devoted to Letter and Word Study. In addition to the new program, the Committee also developed a three-tier model which will identify students in need of additional reading help and specialized instruction. Tier 1 covers core instruction going to all students. Tier 2 includes intervention for weaker readers and Tier 3 is termed “intensive intervention.” A literary team in which the classroom teacher has a key role is responsible for classifying the students. Students who reach Tier 3 may be receiving as much as an extra hour of reading and word study instruction each day. It is also possible that students in Tiers 2 and 3 be taught in a program other than Phonics and Friends, like Project Read which has been a successful multi-sensory approach. Students in Tiers 2 and 3 are assessed more frequently so that instruction can be modified as needed.

The Board asked questions about time allocation, assessments, differentiation, experience in other districts, Project Read, Reading Recovery, deployment of literacy staff, responsibility for identification of students, response by staff to new program, impact on ALP program.

The Board asked how the District will assess the effectiveness of this new program. The Administration indicated there should be improvement in the Grade 3 CMT in three years, while formative assessments will be used by teachers to inform instructions. The Board indicated that more timely assessments of student performance need to be developed.

In response to the Board’s question about how the District funded the purchase, the Administration indicated that the budgeted funds for Everyday Math were able to be covered in the prior year leaving available funds for this new initiative. Mrs. Giambo acknowledged that the Administration demonstrated a need; however she noted that the curriculum process was not followed. The Board and the public were not informed as the Committee was doing its work; thus did not have an opportunity to comment.

The Committee indicated that the next steps include looking at Reader’s Workshop, Writer’s Workshop, working with the Principals in each building.

4. Agenda Planning

Mrs. Giambo indicated the proposed changes to the Agenda Plan, but suggested deferring a vote to the next Board meeting.

5. Meeting Debriefing

Mrs. Giambo thanked Ms. Jordan-Whitney and Ms. Ross for their thorough presentation and for sending materials in advance of the meeting.

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Kelly and seconded by Mrs. Weissler, the meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Leslie Moriarty
Secretary